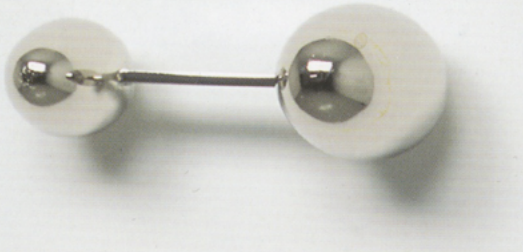

Richard Rezac

Selected Sculpture and Drawings
2003-2008

College of DuPage

Richard Rezac

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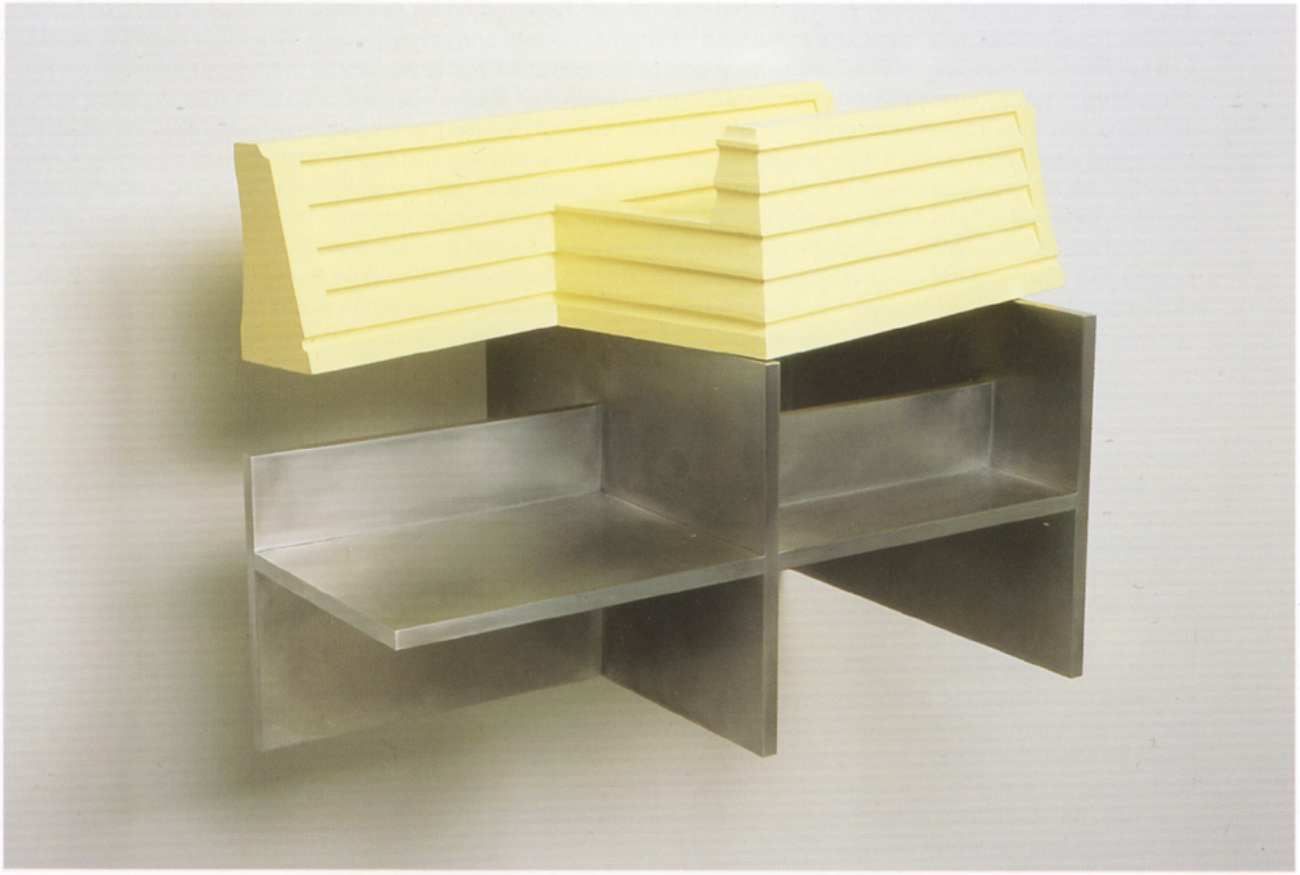
What, after all, might be most akin to an encounter with a sculpture by Richard Rezac? I can only speak for myself, of course, but the closest thing I can liken it to is that moment when driving down a street in Elmhurst or River Forest or wherever and suddenly there's a Frank Lloyd Wright house, or one by George Washington Maher or Walter Burley Griffin, and all at once everything seems different, heightened somehow, the air seems charged and time begins to stop. What seemed ubiquitous, common, invisible, almost beneath notice – in this case, domestic architecture – becomes almost excruciatingly pertinent and active, an encounter that completely reframes that experience, both of and not of our understanding of the world, extending a language we thought we knew with fresh harmonies and challenges. Walls and eaves, windows and chimneys, etc., suddenly become sites of such formal delectation, such exquisite proportion and grace, such perfect interaction and structural inevitability, that they turn the prose of building into the poetry of architecture.

Architecture certainly has been a source of inspiration for Rezac, and aspects of his work regularly investigate its systems and procedures. Not in a volumetric sense, though – what seems to intrigue Rezac about architecture is its seeming infinity of thoughtful planar geometric structure, its details rather than its totality, and its long development of evocative traditions of pattern and physical embellishment that can become the site of fascinating mathematical and visual interplay. Like an architect, Rezac often begins his work with drafting tools and graph paper, with a sequence of drawings where he works out some core geometric incident that interests him, that he can spin out in a way that often both has it turn inward on itself while also suggesting infinite extension. A final working drawing with plan and elevation eventually results from this ceaseless tweaking and adjustment, and it is as serviceable a model for Rezac's subsequent sculpture as an architect's plan is for the building he or she creates.

Let me play out this architectural metaphor a little further – *Glisan*, 2006, seems Rezac at his most architectonic. It could almost be seen as a model for some whimsical pavilion, with a creamy yellow wooden roof set over a severe structural aluminum support. The stepped-like articulation of the roof, with its emphasis on long horizontal striations, gives it all a slight resemblance to a pagoda roofline. But it also suggests Frank Lloyd Wright in some of his California buildings, such as the Aline Barnsdall house of around 1917, lush, evocative and modern. The naked aluminum armature it surmounts seems cold, intensely logical. It's a little abridged grid of relentless logic, couched in a decision to privilege modular thinking, exuding a sense of geometry uber alles. This seems more the realm of Mies van der Rohe, the other giant of 20th century architecture who centered much of his career in Chicago and its vicinity. This all appears to me no act of historicist homage by Rezac to Mies or Wright, but the inevitable absorption of aspects of their vision by an artist extremely attentive to such things, a recognition that it is impossible to live in northern Illinois without being touched by its architectural legacy.

But we should broaden this – can we consider calling all this, this elusive quality of Rezac's work, its attentiveness to spinning new harmonies out of seemingly benign patterns or abstract pictorial incidents, his process of intense but inevitable investigation and his ability to riff bits of unexpected rhythms into something that seems so stable and fulfilled, can we call all this something like "geometerotics"? There are, after all, few intellectual clichés more stubborn and silly than that realms of inquiry, such as mathematics, design, science, architecture, hard-edged abstraction, etc., are somehow solely rational arenas, cool and aloof, reflecting only intelligence and systemic order and somehow devoid of feeling and passion. If you can do it with a T-square, a pencil and graph paper, some argue, if it seems rooted in numbers, it's somehow distant from the human heart, it's clinical and detached from emotion. We, however, need no more than spend a few hours with an engineer or a mathematician, read a biography of Einstein or Newton, or look closely at the work of an artist such as Richard Rezac to see how incorrect that analysis is, to sense the issues that seethe, literally seethe, in their otherwise crisp realms, how full of drama their practice is, how beneath what only seem implacable and imperturbable surfaces the struggles and intensities that endlessly roil around.



Glisan, 2006, painted wood and aluminum, 17.75" x 26.75" x 15.75"

It is difficult to ascertain in every case just what it is that sets Rezac off on his search to create an object that fulfills his need to elucidate or extrapolate some kind of internal pattern or rhythm. Usually it's a thing from the world, a detail from the molding of a building, the shape of a banister, a fragment of some manufactured object, a bit of clothing, a pattern on wallpaper, etc. Rezac then subjects that source element or pattern to what seem intense and hypersensitive adjustments and permutations that cull out its essence, employing unexpected materials and colors that can range far from their original impetus, somehow refining and clarifying it, making it pertinent and heightened. His resulting object is that source material or geometric gesture now made dysfunctional, art, not life, but able to reveal fully its architectonics and suggest transcendent harmonies, achieving a kind of vibrant stasis, a kind of active purification. Rezac's process reminds me a bit of when a composer takes a relatively simple theme or tune and then runs it through a range of variations, the original theme remaining the tether, but exploring realms farther and farther afield, sometimes obscuring its source. For Rezac those explorations take place through color, choice of materials, positioning of the sculpture on the wall or the floor or hanging over our heads, etc.

As an exercise, for example, try to describe a sculpture by Richard Rezac, try to use words that would tell someone who couldn't see *Lancaster (04-03)*, 2004, or *Untitled (06-01)*, 2006, precisely and definitively how it appears. It seems simple enough, you drone on, as I did a year or two ago in a review of *Lancaster* about unassuming painted wood rails in some intersective conjunction, mathematical and formal intricacies that keep the eye hopping, the tempo of the sequencing of the vertical rails, the blue and salmon paint, the relation of the second rail to the first, a description that finally tells very little about what Lancaster looks like. Words only seem to get you deeper into inaccuracies or incompleteness. Rezac is an artist who makes open, not closed, systems, who spins out possibilities, whose solutions, as it were, to the geometrical impulses that motivate him are more ideated than factual.

If I can put this correctly, Richard Rezac is an artist of whom I am wary. His work at first seems so simple, it's modest in scale (considering the ambitious trumpeting of much modern sculpture), rarely the most immediately dramatic piece in the room, stunningly subtle and imbued with a quiet fire that only eventually becomes all absorbing, that might be missed with a too cursory glance. I know that I'm going to have to bring my lunch, so to speak, that Rezac's work requires time, almost meditation-like time, that it does not give up its secrets easily, that I have to get my heartbeat and breathing slowed up enough to enter this work, that I have to puzzle out the path he has pursued. It's always a journey worth taking.

I began this essay with a tale of Elmhurst and River Forest, but we can do better. Why not a gray morning in Rome (Rezac recently spent a year there), when you're walking about and turn a corner and see a Baroque church by Borromini, say, San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane? No need to go in, just slowly let the façade of the church enter you, see how Borromini made stone function like plastic, cursive, flexible, changeling, how things warp when they should woof and vice versa, how every detail is separate while also being totally integrated into the whole, how line and mass and volume weave into and out of each other, how nothing is irrelevant, there's no filler, how integrity and commitment are imbued into the placement of each and every stone. Richard Rezac is far too modest to claim a similar accomplishment, though he might acknowledge a similar aspiration – how can one clarify complexity, and how can a sculpture make physical the order/disorder in the geometries everywhere around us, revealing the poetics immediately at hand, just waiting for the suggestive clarification that only an artist can give? This way.

— *James Yood*

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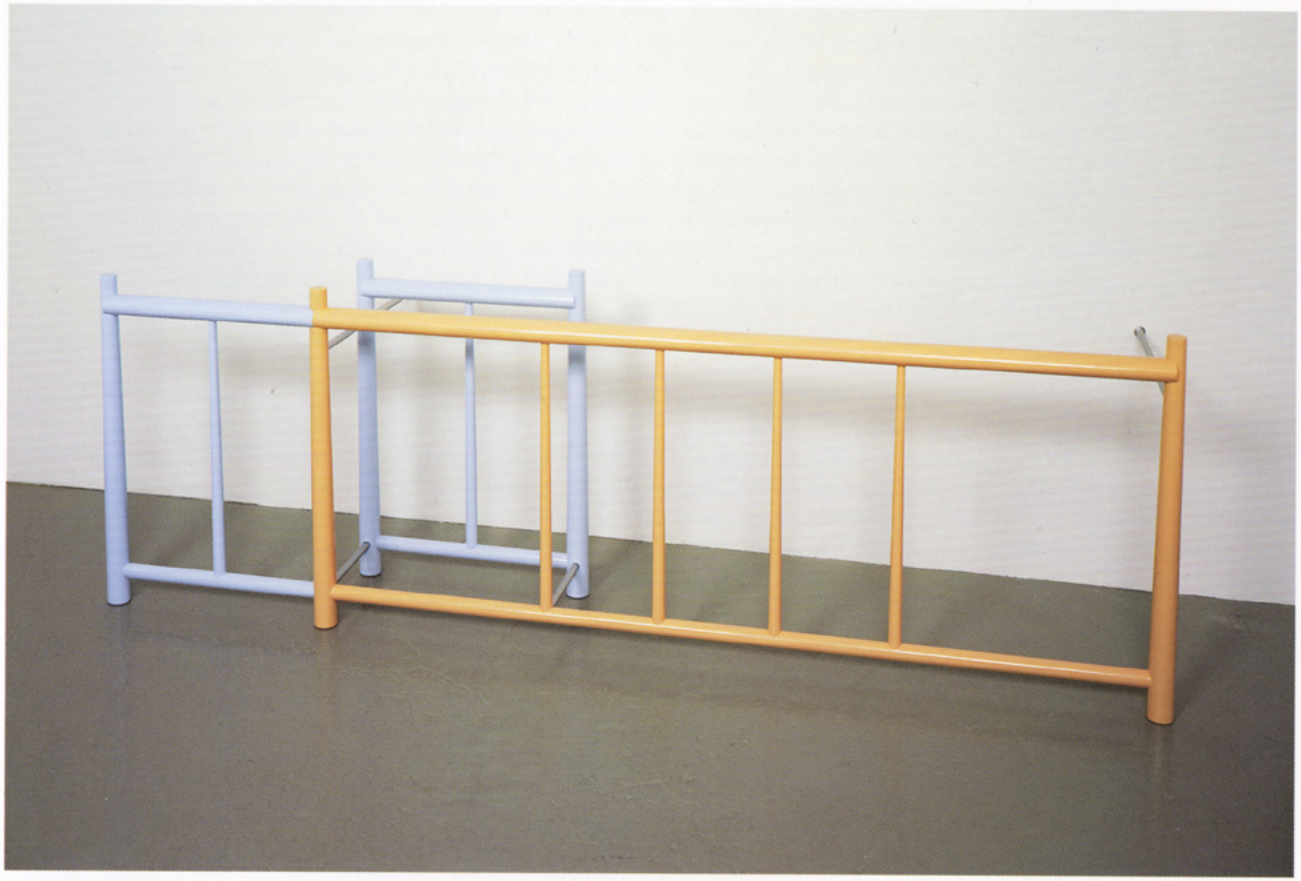
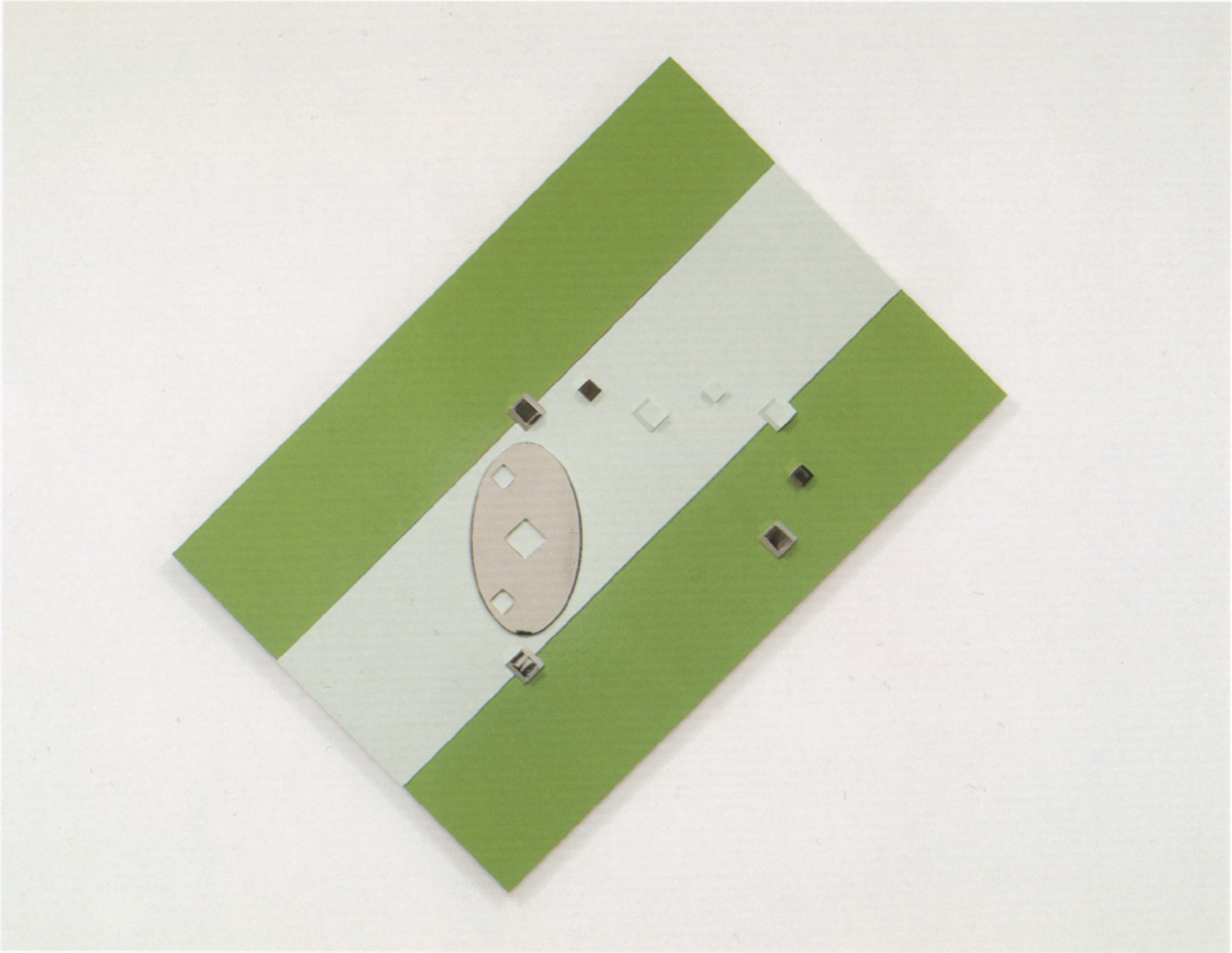


Lancaster, 2004, painted wood, steel, aluminum, 31.25" x 95" x 26.25"



Untitled (06-01), 2006, painted wood, nickel-plated and painted cast bronze, 37.5" x 37.5" x 1.5"